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The Open Mind

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The Kennedy Administration remains immensely popular. This condition appears to mystify even the Democrats it delights. Yet there is an entirely simple explanation.

The Kennedy Administration is one of those charming creatures which does not know what it thinks. The open mind has become our national ideal, and any President who so entirely represents it has cause to feel the victim of prejudice when his popularity chart stands no higher than 71 per cent.

I am grateful to I. F. Stone, a continuing experience, for discovering this vignette of American policy in Laos in *Le Monde* of Paris: "Almost every morning, the U. S. Ambassador, Monsieur Brown, visits Gen. Phoumi (the Laotian Defense Minister) to persuade him to accept the formula of a coalition with the Communists, which is alone capable of permitting unification of the country and reestablishment of peace. Every evening, an expert of MAAG (the U. S. Military Advisory Group in Laos) or of the Central Intelligence Agency comes to cheer up the general and incite him to oppose any entry of Reds into the government."

A certain suspension of debate seems to have fallen upon our journalism.

Last week, as an example, the Senate Armed Services Committee held hearings on the nomination of John A. McCone as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. This is a peculiar position for being entirely free of public scrutiny. The day after McCone is confirmed, he will disappear into a dark corridor from which only unconfirmed rumor will occasionally echo.

This being our last shot at McCone, one might assume a certain interest among journalists in the sort of man he is and what he thinks. But the *New York Times*' account of the hearings was confined to some shadowy stuff about how he made his pile which, while interesting, was generally tangential. The idea of the man held

by the man who will be final resort for foreign intelligence went entirely unmentioned.

The only summary of the opinions McCone expressed to the Senate committee come from Nora Beloff in Sunday's *London Observer*:

"The McCone statement that he ~~believes~~, and still believes, in massive retaliation failed to spark off an argument. So did his refusal, repeated twice during the hearings, to identify himself with the President's own view that America must aim to avert the choice between nuclear holocaust and surrender."

Miss Beloff deserves all possible credit for having tried what her American colleagues from the dailies were too apathetic to try, even though her summary does not appear entirely accurate.

McCone did say: "I have been and continue to be a strong supporter of massive retaliation." Sen. Russell later described him as second in importance only to President Kennedy in international affairs, a position which makes that opinion not only relevant but somewhat chilling.

Miss Beloff seems, however, to have gone a little too far in saying that McCone declined to associate himself with President Kennedy's expressed desire to find some policy between nuclear war and surrender. He merely said that it was a statement "subject to various interpretations," i.e., he didn't know what it meant. But does anyone really know what it means? And can anyone really say that, in his support of massive retaliation, McCone disagrees with the President? Who really knows whether the President is for or against massive retaliation?

More important than that, who asks? There is nothing wrong with the condition that the President is popular. But there is something very wrong if he is popular because no one really knows what he thinks and if Dean Rusk, Adlai Stevenson, and John McCone can all be loyal servants of a master and one of whose statements can be interpreted three different ways.